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September 2011 Newsletter

Through the Challenges, Archaeology Blossoms at Howard University

By Flordeliz T. Bugarin and Eleanor King*

Despite the news in January 2011 that the Howard University anthropology program would close, students and faculty in archaeology swung into full gear and had some of our busiest and most productive spring and summer months to date. Shortly after President Sidney Ribeau announced the programs on the list for closure, we began working on two proposals, one intended to create a new interdisciplinary program and the other focused on integrating an anthropology concentration into sociology. Concerned mostly about our current students and research projects, we also continued to organize field schools, gather data from the collections housed in our labs, and create new opportunities for undergraduates to obtain research and practical experience.

The decision to close the program impacts the students the most, since it means that a major in anthropology will no longer be offered at Howard University. Remaining classes, however, will ensure the continued presence of a “concentration in anthropology” on campus and students have until 2015 to finish their major requirements. The current challenge for faculty is to determine how to interpret the meaning of a “concentration,” whether it entails only a few classes suited for other majors or a more reflective picture of our discipline from a four-field approach. As a faculty, we are collectively strong in archaeology, so we have a vested interest in retaining some of these classes.

Luckily, within the new framework at Howard there is a strong emphasis on improving the institution’s research profile and keeping research projects intact. There has been a push towards interdisciplinary and collaborative research. In addition, the administration is encouraging the development of undergraduate and graduate research opportunities. Administrative officials have also stated that they want to make sure that all of our collections

are well taken care of, maintained appropriately, and considered as a priority in any transition. These priorities have all ensured that, for the moment at least, Howard archaeology continues to be strong.

To continue and enhance our research efforts, particularly in the historical archaeology of Africa and the African Diaspora, faculty and students over the summer made many strides. Along with Joy Beasley, Cultural Resources Manager for Monocacy National Battlefield, we ran a short field school at the Best Farm Slave Village site in Frederick, Maryland. The objectives of the field school from our point of view were to test the feasibility of this location for future field schools and research. Its accessibility to Howard as well as its intrinsic interest makes it attractive for training and investigative purposes. In addition, the multifaceted history of the site, with its French owners, culturally diverse enslaved population, and German neighbors, presents a challenge in terms of archival research. We wanted to examine the potential of engaging other colleagues on campus to conduct research, for example, in German and French archives on the site and its inhabitants. Finally, we hoped both to help advance the archaeological work already conducted on the site and to further familiarize ourselves with a project that has included several of our students. For two weeks, Howard faculty and students worked with a National Park Service (NPS) crew. In addition to the students of the field school, two other Howard students were employed by the NPS as summer crewmembers.

Investigations this year focused on three areas near and around what used to be the quarters for enslaved people. Behind one of the structures, we searched for a paling fence that likely enclosed vegetable gardens. The outline of the activity area had already been uncovered prior to the field school, so excavations focused on further defining the feature. We also continued to explore the interior of one of the houses and what was thought to be a midden.

While results were still tentative towards the end of the field school, a possible fence outline was discovered and the midden area proved to have been correctly identified by NPS crewmembers. The NPS team suspected that the midden might pertain to an outdoor kitchen. Preliminary archival research in French colonial records during and after the project revealed there is accessible material to be mined, including documents pertaining to the military and governmental service of one of the owners. Joy Beasley will present the results of the Best Farm research at the 2012 Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) meetings in Baltimore, Maryland.

In addition, a Howard undergraduate from the NPS team will present at the 2012 Society for American Archaeology (SAA) meetings in Memphis, Tennessee.

Meanwhile, in the Howard University archaeology lab this summer, Flordeliz Bugarin ran an internship program for undergraduate students interested in the historical archaeology of Africa and the African Diaspora. Students worked on collections from Nicodemus, Kansas (from the Thomas Johnson and Henry Williams' Farm and the District 1 School sites), and James Island in The Gambia, West Africa. Nicodemus was an African American town settled during the Reconstruction period. James Island was a central location where colonial populations traded enslaved people. In addition to processing artifacts and learning lab techniques, students designed their own research projects based on their work with the collections. They will present their research for the 2012 Howard University Undergraduate Research Symposium and at both the 2012 SHA and SAA meetings.

Graduating senior in anthropology and McNair Fellow Mia Carey completed her research over the summer and presented her findings during the McNair Undergraduate Research Symposium. She looked at the fauna and soils of the Nicodemus collection in order to understand the health, sanitation, and environmental conditions of the settlers. This phase of the research resulted in a joint article submitted for publication with Bugarin. Before she graduates in December, she plans to conduct further research on the fauna and produce supplementary materials focused on changes in the natural environment. She, too, will be presenting at the SHA and SAA meetings.

In addition to lab work, conducting research, and attending the Monocacy field school, the Howard students engaged in a number of other activities as part of the internship program. We traveled to colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, to see recreated colonial events, original buildings and structures, and different museums. After weeks of working with fragmented pieces, they were able to gain perspective as they looked at whole, intact, 18th century material goods. We also participated in the first Archaeology Day fair in Washington, D.C. on July 29. Along with descriptions of the anthropology program's other projects (i.e., South African Fort Willshire Project, the Monocacy Archaeological Project, and the Gila Archaeological Project), both the Nicodemus and James Island projects were featured at the Howard University booth. To prepare for this outreach event, Bugarin and the Howard students created games (i.e., word search puzzles and a memory game) and established activity stations for children (i.e., a bead-

stringing jewelry station and a clay, marble-making table). Displaying pictures of indigenous people wearing beads, toys found at different sites, and excavations at each site allowed students and their professor to link activity stations to the objectives of archaeology, the understanding of culture, and the significance of African and African American history.

Meanwhile, in July Eleanor King traveled to New Mexico with four Howard undergraduates and two recent graduates to conduct research on the interactions among Buffalo Soldiers, Apaches, and European-American miners in the Southwest. The Gila Archaeological Project (GAP), now in its fourth year, has been investigating the way that these different groups used the landscape in the Black Range of New Mexico and how both their usage and interactions helped to create what we see today. The GAP partners with the Gila National Forest and the National Park Service to bring together students from Howard, different Apache nations, and elsewhere to facilitate learning about this past. This year, in addition to the Howard contingent, we had students from the Mescalero Apache Reservation, the San Carlos Apache Reservation, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Christopher Adams, Zone Archaeologist for the Black Range and Gila Wilderness Ranger Districts, continued to work with us all month, as did NPS partners Charles Haecker and Larry Ludwig, who were able to join us for part of the season. In addition, Beverly Chiarulli of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, who is usually with us in the field, continued to provide technical support.

This season's main goal was to locate Buffalo Soldier and Apache sites that have remained elusive. Our focus has been on the Victorio Wars, or the last Apache uprising, when Buffalo Soldiers from the 9th Cavalry and other units in New Mexico fought the Warm Springs Apache and their allies. Unfortunately, clear evidence of sites is hard to find due to the narrow time frame (roughly the late 1870s to the early 1880s).

This year we were buoyed by research carried out in the National Archives by King and Howard graduate Kathrina Aben, now at the University of Maryland, College Park. Our work yielded a substantial number of maps created by the military during their patrols and during mapping and other expeditions in this area. One of the season's objectives, then, was to try to ground truth some of the old roads and trails. By doing so we hoped to locate more habitual campsites along these routes, which we reasoned would leave more of a record than the camping areas occupied for only a day or two. This year's record heat and dry conditions helped clearly reveal locations of permanent water sources, thereby narrowing our possibilities. We also

looked for further traces of the Apache Scouts' route from their battle against Victorio at Palomas Creek, which we had documented last year. Unfortunately, we found no clear site indicators.

On the positive side, we were able to cross-reference some 50 local maps and rule out areas for further research. We also found an Apache site dating to a slightly earlier time period. One problem we ran into is that modern routes and settlements now directly overlie most of the old trails, roads, and campsites. In many cases, these obstructions have obliterated all traces of past activity. Another problem is that the more pristine sites are in remote wilderness areas that are difficult to access. We remain hopeful, however, of eventually being able to document the passage of different groups through this area.

Another objective was to finish ground-truthing a GPR survey conducted last year at the site of Hermosa, a late 19th century mining town turned ghost town. In summer 2010 Beverly Chiarulli directed subsurface investigations of two parts of the site, one where the schoolhouse was thought to be located and the other where house foundations and hearth-like features showed on the surface. Our objective was to conduct comparative surveys (including walkover, metal-detecting, and geophysical surveys) and ground truth them. Last year we were able to ground truth one area; this year, with Chiarulli's input, we tested the other one. We are currently processing the data. Students from the 2011 GAP field season will present their research at the SAA meetings.

Recent efforts of all Howard University anthropology faculty including Flordeliz Bugarin, Eleanor King, Arvilla Payne-Jackson, and Mark Mack have inspired a significant portion of our majors to go to graduate school in anthropology, particularly for historical archaeology of Africa and the African Diaspora. Among the December 2011 graduating anthropology seniors, for example, three are intending to apply to graduate school in archaeology. Our work this summer has also had an unexpected, serendipitous effect: one outcome of our work at Monocacy was that pictures of students, faculty and excavations were posted throughout the summer on Howard's home web pages. We were also featured on local television and print news, a reminder to many about the significance of African Diaspora historical archaeology, and the overall contributions of anthropology in general for understanding an African American past.

Despite the determination of administration to end the anthropology major for undergraduates, the faculty remains steadfast in our efforts to introduce our discipline to students, provide the needed research skills, methods, and theory to students interested in graduate school, and continue to include Howard students in our ongoing research projects. We are confident that archaeology at Howard has a strong foothold to remain.

Note

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